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#### HYDRONICS

Hydronics in  
the High Country

p 16

#### PLUMBING

Universal Design: More  
Relevant Than Ever

p 38

#### MECHANICAL

Don't Let Your Energy  
Go Down the Drain

p 50

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**PHCP PROS**  
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**news**

## 2019 Heating Season Preview

New technologies fuel energy-efficient efforts. p28.



## PLUMBING

## Universal Design: More Relevant Than Ever

Wellness and accessibility are key themes when designing kitchens and bathrooms for all ages and abilities.

BY LINDA JENNINGS

Universal design is not a trend, but a real and growing movement that seeks to maximize the usability of a space for people regardless of their age, size or ability. The genesis for this movement can be seen through demographics revealing significant changes in the traditional household. Empty-nesters are finding college graduates returning home, aging parents are living with younger generations, and downsizing seems to be a thing of the past as families grow unexpectedly.

These trends indicate that smart design has never been more critical, particularly in the kitchen and bathroom. Instead of having multiple bathrooms for “show,” consumers are looking for fewer bathrooms that function for all. The bath also needs to double as a wellness area to rejuvenate a household of individuals with different needs and stress points.

Contractors are being called on to plan and install designs meeting a variety of needs. Key manufacturers are welcoming the challenge and developing solutions to address the multigenerational design movement. Their goal is to create innovative designs that provide accessibility for all within budgets suitable for all.

MTI Baths is a veteran brand in the universal design movement, with a history that includes more than three decades of design philosophy focusing on wellness therapies and inclusive strategies. Michael Kornowa, the company's marketing director, sees the movement as an opportunity for designers, architects, builders and plumbers to be of even greater value to their clients as they work with them in designing living spaces and selecting products to promote wellness in their daily lives in a holistic way.

This also means educating their customers to have a proactive voice in house plan development.

“Wouldn't it be a wonderful service for house plans to include alternative option packages for accessibility features, especially for the very critical kitchen and bath areas?” he points out. “As the plans are being developed, future needs should be raised by the builder or



QuickDrain USA's WallDrain system.

designer, who could offer strategic approaches to these rooms.”

One example for the kitchen could be to install touch-free faucets for those with arthritic hands or a limited range of motion. In the bathroom, advance planning can make a huge difference. Kornowa suggests considering options for extra framing to enable the addition of secured grab bars if needed. Enhanced structural support in the shower could allow the possibility of a wall-mounted seat. Different types of water therapies — air bath, whirlpool or microbubbles or even a foot spa — are features appreciated by people of any age but particularly by seniors with circulatory or skin issues.

MTI offers an extensive line of wall-mounted sinks designed explicitly for smaller spaces and accessible bathrooms. The sinks can be installed at ADA-compliant heights, and the open space around them makes it easier to navigate with a walker or wheelchair. They are available in a variety of sizes and shapes to suit any décor. Crafted of SculptureStone, a durable material that is 75-percent organic and completely solid throughout, these beautiful yet practical sinks are available in a matte finish or a hand-polished gloss.

### Functional Focal Point

Custom designs are often a smart choice when it comes to meeting specific needs. The Furniture Guild

is known for its custom heirloom-quality bathroom furniture with an impressive array of options and finishes. The company teamed up with Fancy Fixtures of Long Island, New York, to create a stunning wall-to-wall bathroom vanity with an oversized opening for easy wheelchair access.

Inspired by its Avalon series, this custom piece is installed at an ADA-compliant height with a rectangular basin. The wall-mounted design is ideal for accessibility and helps conserve space in tight quarters. The long counter and double set of drawers provide plenty of elbow



Huntington two-piece toilet with ADA-compliant design from Icera.

Lenova's TKO Touch kitchen faucet.



room and storage space.

The Avalon is offered in seven configurations with single or double basins in sizes ranging from 24 inches to 96 inches. Shown here in a beautiful natural walnut, the vanity is available in an array of finishes including exotic woods, textured surfaces, super matte, high gloss and automotive.

### Hands-Free Function

Lenova makes kitchen work more accessible and more hygienic with its TKO Touch faucets. Perfect for those with mobility or coordination issues, this contemporary faucet allows water to flow with a simple touch of the wrist or forearm. It's also great for chefs with messy hands and to prevent the possible transfer of bacteria from raw foods.

The TKO Touch collection includes safety features that fit well with universal design issues, such as an automatic shut-off and integrated sensors with LED lights to indicate water temperature. The battery-powered faucet is constructed of lead-free brass and coated with an advanced PVD finish for long-lasting beauty.

Available in brushed nickel and polished chrome, TKO Touch faucets include a pull-down adjustable sprayer and a single-lever handle.

### Smart Style

Designing a bathroom that everyone in the family can use

requires some thoughtful planning. Icera makes the process a little easier with its Huntington two-piece toilet with ADA-compliant design. Its chair-height bowl is easy to access for all age groups; the elongated bowl provides extra comfort and convenience.

The Huntington has a compact shape with a small footprint, leaving more space for maneuvering. Other niceties include a quick-release seat, a silent-close lid and a MicroGlaze anti-microbial finish for easy cleaning. The Huntington is as stylish as it is practical, with classic lines and a sleek

silhouette. Its high-efficiency design requires just 1.28 gallons per flush and includes the company's signature EcoQuattro flushing technology for maximum performance.

It is easy on the budget, too, with a modest price point that will appeal to savvy consumers.

### When Invisibility Matters

Accessibility is keenly important when it comes to bathing. Those with limited mobility may have difficulty stepping over even low barriers to enter a shower. Slippery surfaces with standing water also can pose a safety hazard. WallDrain Systems offers a great solution with its line of low-profile channel drainage systems for showers and wet areas.

It allows showers to be built with a curbless entry and has the added benefit of eliminating unsightly center drains. This award-winning product is engineered to run flush against the wall, rendering it practically invisible and yet incredibly effective. Its patented Sure Flow System can be installed in mere hours. By sloping the shower floor to one channel, water and debris are efficiently removed after each use, leaving behind a clean, dry floor surface with no standing water in the drain system.

WallDrain uses a 316L stainless-steel channel body and a grate assembly that can be adjusted to the thickness of ceramic tiles or stone coverings. The system comes in three standard sizes (48 inches, 72 inches and 96 inches) and offers a high degree of customization and versatility. The look is sleek



The Furniture Guild/Fancy Fixtures' custom-made Avalon vanity.

## PLUMBING



## PLUMBING

Wall-mounted sink at ADA-compliant height from MTI Baths.



and modern, and the universal design benefits make this drain system a smart choice for multigenerational households.

As the universal design movement grows, more products and design solutions will be developed to help consumers fully use their homes for every member of their family. The key is to help the public understand and appreciate the tools available to them.

"With an increasing number of people serious about holistic wellness and aging in place, I believe we have a wonderful opportunity to increase awareness of the many possibilities that exist

and guide them in their selection," Kornowa says. "This will make professionals in our industry even more valuable to their clients as they create living spaces that will promote wellness in their daily lives and allow generations to live together in ease and comfort."

For more information on these brands and their universal design products, visit their websites at:

- The Furniture Guild, [www.thefurnitureguild.com](http://www.thefurnitureguild.com)
- Icera, [www.iceausa.com](http://www.iceausa.com)
- Lenova, [www.lenovasinks.com](http://www.lenovasinks.com)
- MTI Baths, [www.mtibaths.com](http://www.mtibaths.com)

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